

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. RES. 99

Expressing the sense of the Senate that the Government of Uzbekistan should immediately enforce its existing domestic legislation and fulfill its international commitments aimed at ending state-sponsored forced and child labor.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 2, 2009

Mr. HARKIN (for himself, Mr. SANDERS, and Mr. BINGAMAN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate that the Government of Uzbekistan should immediately enforce its existing domestic legislation and fulfill its international commitments aimed at ending state-sponsored forced and child labor.

Whereas the United States has a growing strategic involvement in Central Asia;

Whereas the interests of the United States in Central Asia, including the operations in Afghanistan, can only be secured by the presence in the region of viable, vigorous democracies that fully guarantee the economic and social rights of all people, including children;

Whereas the Government of Uzbekistan continues to commit serious human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrest and detention, torture in custody, and the severe restriction of freedom of speech, the press, religion, independent political activity, and nongovernmental organizations;

Whereas the Government of Uzbekistan detains thousands of people for political or religious reasons;

Whereas Uzbekistan is the third largest exporter of cotton in the world, and cotton is 1 of the largest sources of export revenue for Uzbekistan;

Whereas Uzbekistan has signed and properly deposited with the International Labour Organization (ILO) the Minimum Age Convention, convened at Geneva June 6, 1973 (International Labour Organization Convention Number 138), and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, convened at Geneva June 1, 1999 (International Labour Organization Convention Number 182);

Whereas the Government of Uzbekistan issued a decree in September 2008 that ostensibly prohibited the practice of forced and child labor, but the Government of Uzbekistan sent schoolchildren to harvest cotton within weeks after issuing the decree;

Whereas the 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices by the Department of State stated that large-scale compulsory mobilization of youth and students to harvest cotton continued in most rural areas of Uzbekistan and that the students and youths were poorly paid, living conditions were poor, and children were exposed to harmful chemicals and pesticides applied in the cotton fields;

Whereas research by the Environmental Justice Foundation indicates that each year hundreds of thousands of school-

children from Uzbekistan, some as young as 7 years old, are forced by the Government of Uzbekistan to work in the national cotton harvest for up to 3 months;

Whereas a policy briefing published by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 2008, entitled “Invisible to the World”, used extrapolations based on surveys in 6 areas that took place in 2006 and 2007 to conclude that approximately 2,400,000 schoolchildren from Uzbekistan between the ages of 10 and 15 are forcibly recruited into the annual cotton harvest;

Whereas the British Broadcasting Company undertook an investigation in late 2007 and found that the Government of Uzbekistan continues to rely on the state-orchestrated mass mobilization of children to bring in the cotton harvest;

Whereas, in 2008, reports of child labor in the cotton fields were received by multiple media outlets and local human rights activists from the major cotton-growing regions in Uzbekistan, including Djizzak, Namangan, Samarkand, and Ferghana, among others;

Whereas a report by the Rapid Reaction Group indicates that schoolchildren who cannot fulfill their daily picking quotas are forced to make up the difference in cash from the pockets of their own families;

Whereas the Government of Uzbekistan detained and harassed an independent journalist who accompanied a diplomat from the United States on a research trip to Syr Daria province, where the diplomat photographed children working in the cotton fields;

Whereas the children working in the cotton fields are stressed by the pressure to fulfill cotton quotas, physically abused

by arduous work in the cotton fields, and subjected to poor and hazardous living conditions during the harvest period;

Whereas international brands such as Gap, H&M, Levi Strauss, Limited Brands, Target, Tesco, and Wal-Mart have banned cotton from Uzbekistan from their products and instructed their suppliers to comply with the ban;

Whereas the Government of Uzbekistan allowed a survey to be conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), under the strict supervision of the Government of Uzbekistan, yet the survey was not conducted during the fall harvest season (a time when the likelihood of children working in the fields is significantly greater);

Whereas the Government of Uzbekistan refused to fully cooperate with the ILO and the International Cotton Advisory Committee to undertake an independent technical assessment of forced child labor during the fall 2008 harvest season; and

Whereas the ILO has conducted independent investigations into forced and child labor in more than 60 countries around the world, including developing and developed countries: Now, therefore, be it

- 1 *Resolved*, That it is the sense of the Senate that the
- 2 Government of Uzbekistan should—
- 3 (1) immediately enforce its existing domestic
- 4 legislation and fulfill its international commitments
- 5 aimed at ending state-sponsored forced and child
- 6 labor;

1 (2) allow a comprehensive independent inves-
2 tigation into forced and child labor in the cotton sec-
3 tor during the fall 2009 harvest season by the Inter-
4 national Labour Organization;

5 (3) in consultation and cooperation with the
6 International Labour Organization, develop a cred-
7 ible and comprehensive action plan based on the
8 findings of the International Labour Organization
9 and commit the resources necessary to end forced
10 and child labor in the cotton sector; and

11 (4) take concrete steps towards systemic reform
12 that will—

13 (A) ensure greater freedom and better re-
14 turns from their labor for cotton-producing
15 farmers; and

16 (B) enable such farmers to employ adults
17 in the cotton sector.

○